

- Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
- Smith, Frederick M. 1991. 'Indra's Curse, Varuṇa's Noose, and the Suppression of the Woman in the Vedic *Śrauta* Ritual.' See Leslie 1991:17-45.
- Sontheimer, Günther, and Kulke, Hermann, eds. 1991. *Hinduism Reconsidered*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Thieme, Paul. 1971. 'Agastya und Lopāmudrā.' In *Kleine Schriften*, 1. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH.
- Upadhyaya, Bhagwat Saran. 1974. *Women in Rg Veda*. (Foreword by S. Radhakrishnan.) New Delhi: S. Chand.
- White, Hayden. 1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

3

The Ahalyā Story through the Ages

Renate Söhnen-Thieme

Introduction

If Indra is imagined as a 'womanizer' in Indian Literature, one may well ask who were the women who became his prey. An Indian, asked this question, answered without hesitation, 'Oh, so many!' Asked to name some of them, he replied, 'Well, Ahalyā, for instance.' Asked for other names, he was in some difficulty. Evidently there is only this one instance, and it may be worth while looking at it more closely.

About the beginnings of the relationship between Indra and Ahalyā we do not know much. It does not belong to the old stock of Vedic lore, such as the story of Śunaḥśepa (the young brahmin who was sold by his father as a sacrificial animal but was able to release himself from the sacrificial post by 'beholding' Rgvedic hymns), or the story of Purūravas and Urvaśī, which is the topic of a particular dialogue hymn in the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Rgveda*. The name Ahalyā is not mentioned at all in the *Rgveda*; the name Indra of course occurs very frequently, but never in connection with an adultery story.

The First Version: *Rāmāyaṇa* Book 1

The first explicit narrative of Indra and Ahalyā (see Table 2, Column B: 1) is attested comparatively late, in the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is generally considered to be a later complement of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, adding the story of the hero's birth and early exploits to the epic. It is in the context of Rāma's journey from Viśvāmitra's hermitage to the court of King Janaka that the Ahalyā story is narrated.

The core of the narrative may be summarized as follows: Indra, the king of the gods, has fallen in love with Ahalyā, the wife of an ascetic brahmin

named Gautama. In order to seduce her, Indra takes on the shape of her husband. When caught in the act, he is cursed by the ascetic to lose his testicles (and thereby, naturally, his male powers), a punishment which no doubt reflects an archaic sense of justice and is actually prescribed in the *Āpastambadharmasūtra*:

If sexual intercourse is performed, cutting off the penis and testicles.¹

An ascetic brahmin will not execute the castration directly, with his own hands; a word of his, which is imbued with ascetic power, suffices to effect the punishment.

The beginning of this narrative looks quite similar to a well-known story found in Greek mythology: that of Alkmene and Amphitryon (the first explicit narrative is also attested rather late). In this myth, the great Zeus sees no other way of making love to Alkmene, the faithful wife of King Amphitryon, than by appearing in the shape of her husband. Zeus achieves his goal: Alkmene does not become aware of the deceit until the false Amphitryon is confronted with the real one.

So far the two stories seem to be fairly similar; the second part of the stories, however, shows characteristic differences which reflect the background of religious development in the two societies. In the Greek version, the main emphasis rests on the result of this divine intermingling with human beings: the birth of the semi-divine hero Hercules; even very early allusions to the story in Hesiod and Homer attest this feature. The betrayed husband turns his wrath against his wife whom he believes to be guilty of adultery, and who can only be cleared of suspicion by either Zeus himself or the blind seer Tiresias. (An early vase painting in the British Museum depicts Alkmene about to be burnt at Amphitryon's command: the pyre is already alight when Zeus complies with Alkmene's prayers and has water poured down in order to extinguish the fire.) The idea that Amphitryon might take revenge on the king of the gods is absolutely out of question.

The betrayed husband in the Indian story reacts quite differently. To him, Indra, the king of the gods, no longer means what he meant to the Indo-Aryans at the time of the composition of the Rgvedic hymns. Many centuries of development of religious history lie in between, during which a new world-view evolved, one which might be called 'mechanistic': the once powerful gods no longer have any influence on human affairs, but they are more and more dependent on those human beings who know about the secret correspondences between the world of gods and demons on the one hand, and the world of gods

¹ *saṃnipāte vṛtte śiṣṇāś chedanam savṛṣaṇasya* (2.10.26.20).

and human beings on the other, about the correspondences of microcosm and macrocosm, and who can put this knowledge into effect when performing the traditional sacrifices: these are the brahmins, who in their own way have become more powerful than even the gods. (This development can only be attested with respect to the educated class of those who composed and transmitted the Sanskrit texts which are our sources; as for the ideas or beliefs of other layers of the population, information can be derived only indirectly, for instance in the older parts of the epics or in the Buddhist *Jātaka* tales.)

It was probably this development of new concepts in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts which made it seem at all possible that a human might curse a god, be he even the highest god of the Rgvedic pantheon: Gautama is both a brahmin and an ascetic, who has accumulated immense powers that can be used for putting an effective curse upon whomsoever he chooses. This is quite a common motif in Indian literature: an ascetic, offended by some insignificant slight, invokes a vengeful curse which then becomes the starting-point of dramatic complications (as is the case in Kālidāsa's drama *Śakuntalā*).

Such a curse uttered in rage, however, uses up all the powers accumulated by ascetic practice, and this means that the ascetic has to start afresh, just as he would have to if he had seen a beautiful woman and desired her – another favourite motif in Indian literature (the gods, in order to deprive an ascetic of those powers that seem to be so dangerous for them, send a beautiful *apsaras* who, in most cases, is successful in her task). Passion, be it that of wrath or desire, destroys ascetic powers. Thus, in our story, all the ascetic powers accumulated by Gautama have been exhausted in the curse called down on Indra; indeed Indra can now boast of a deed salutary to the gods and ask a recompense from them; and this is indeed described in our story as it is told in the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.47.15–48.10). The gods ask the deceased ancestors to make over to them, on behalf of Indra, the testicles of a ram (*meṣavṛṣaṇau*) offered at an ancestral rite, which in turn explains why henceforward, as the story states, the ancestors are worshipped with an offering of a castrated ram.

There is another feature in our story from the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which reflects a new development in the history of religion. Ahalyā, guilty of adultery, is also cursed by her husband, but with the rider that she will be released by Rāma when he passes this place on his way to King Janaka's court. This element of the narrative is clearly connected with the context in which the story is told: the sage Viśvāmitra had sought Rāma from his father as protection against some *rākṣasas* who were disturbing his sacrifices; he is now guiding Rāma and his brother to Mithilā, where they are to attend King Janaka's sacrifice. On their way, Viśvāmitra, as a true traveller's guide, tells stories about the places they visit and about their former inhabitants. Shortly before they reach Mithilā, they come across the deserted hermitage of the ascetic Gautama. Viśvāmitra tells Rāma about the adultery that was once committed by Indra

and Ahalyā and led to them being cursed. In this version of the story, Ahalyā (unlike Alkmene in the Greek myth) has some inkling as to who her lover is, but she agrees to his wish 'out of curiosity for the king of the gods' (*devarājakutūhalāt*). Thus not only Indra but also Ahalyā deserves punishment, and Gautama's curse is that she should abide in the ashes, observe a strict fast, and be invisible to everybody, until Rāma, son of Daśaratha, enters this hermitage; by this she would be purified, and by showing hospitality to Rāma she would be allowed to return to her husband. Viśvāmitra completes his story by reporting how Indra regained his sexual powers by means of a ram's testicles (see above), and then invites Rāma to enter the hermitage. Inside Rāma beholds Ahalyā who is invisible to everyone else but appears to him in her beauty and splendour (although obscured by smoke) 'like some divine illusion fashioned by the creator'; Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa touch her feet, and she offers them hospitality. Thereupon showers of blossoms fall down from heaven, celestial drums are sounded, and gods, *gandharvas* and *apsarases* appear and cry, 'Sādhu, sādhu!' ('Well done!'), while Gautama accepts Ahalyā again as his wife.

Now these phenomena, which are also known from the Buddha legend, appear only at outstanding events: in the *Rāmāyaṇa* they occur, for example, after Rāma's final victory over Rāvaṇa; in the *Mahābhārata*, frequently in connection with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa (Arjuna's birth, and his stringing of the bow at Draupadī's *svayamvara*; during Kṛṣṇa's diplomatic mission in the fifth book, where he reveals himself as Viṣṇu). In the context of our story, the emphasis appears to be on the beneficial effect of even the young Rāma, which in turn points to the concept of Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, as which Rāma appears in the *Bālakāṇḍa*.

On the other hand, it may seem strange that so much honour should be paid to the rehabilitation of an adulteress. Would it not be more sensible to assume that, as in the Alkmene story, it is rather the rehabilitation of an unjustly suspected person? Why else would Indra take the shape of the husband of the woman to whom he wants to make love? It is unlikely that he hopes to deceive the husband who knows only too well that the other man cannot be he; his disguise can only be meant to deceive the wife, who would not have agreed to make love to anyone but her husband, not even the king of the gods. Narrative logic would suggest that in a – hypothetical – original form of the story, Ahalyā was actually innocent, that is, she believed that it was her husband to whom she yielded.

Further Attestations in the Epics

There are, however, other versions of the story. The *Rāmāyaṇa* itself provides another story about Indra and Ahalyā (see Table 2, column B), in the last book (7.30.15-41), which is presumably even later than the first book, but may of

course contain older material. This version agrees with that of book 1 only in the fact that Indra had intercourse with Ahalyā (without specifying in which shape, or whether or not she was willing), and that both were cursed by Gautama. The curses, however, are quite different from the ones discussed above and they are not softened – at least if one follows the Baroda edition and rejects the seven and a half verses transmitted only in the southern recension, in which Ahalyā claims to be innocent and induces Gautama to soften his curse in the same way as in the first book (i.e. that she would be purified by the sight of Rāma and then be accepted again by her husband). Most probably this interpolation is influenced by the version of the first book (although she certainly did not claim to be innocent there); for in the version of the last book, the story centres not on Ahalyā, but on Indra. At the end of a long battle between gods and demons (in this context, the *rākṣasas*), Indra has been taken prisoner by Rāvaṇa's son, Indrajit; after being released from prison, he asks Prajāpati why this shame had come upon him. He is then told (or reminded) how he once violated Ahalyā and was consequently cursed by Gautama to fall into the hands of his enemy. This motif must be seen in connection with the idea that Indra's rank, his rule over the gods, has become unstable, so that neither he nor anyone else who might replace him would be able to enjoy this position for long.

This idea points to the other ancient Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*, and in particular to a passage in which Indra's transgression with respect to Ahalyā is used as an argument: the Nahuṣa episode (see Table 2, column A: *Mahābhārata*). Being persecuted by Brahminicide personified (because he has killed the brahmin demon Vṛtra), Indra hides in the water. His office, which is thus vacated, is assigned to Nahuṣa, a grandson of Purūravas. In his new high rank, Nahuṣa soon loses all sense of proportion and claims Śacī, Indra's wife, too. Śacī takes refuge with Bṛhaspati, but Nahuṣa sticks to his claim, adducing in his favour the fact that Indra himself was not restrained from having intercourse with Ahalyā:

Formerly Indra violated Ahalyā, the renowned sage's wife,
although her husband was alive; why did you not prevent him?²

Like the version in *Rāmāyaṇa* book 7, this brief allusion does not state whether Indra appeared in the disguise of the ascetic husband. As for Ahalyā, it seems here that she must have been innocent: this is suggested by the parallel story of Śacī, who refuses to belong to anyone other than Indra, and by the word *dharṣitā* ('violated'), which conveys the idea of a forceful act against the will of

² *ahalyā dharṣitā pūrvam ṛṣipatnī yaśasvinī jīvato bhartur indreṇa sa vaḥ kim na nivāritāh* || *Mahābhārata* 5.12.6.

the person concerned; moreover, the positive epithet *yaśasvinī* ('renowned') would probably not have been applied to an adulteress.

There are two other allusions to the seduction of Ahalyā in the *Mahābhārata* (one in book 12 and one in book 13), which are mainly concerned with Indra's punishment. The latter (13.153.6) states only that Gautama cursed Indra when the god was making love to Ahalyā, but for the sake of *dharma* (*dharmaṁ*) did not harm him. The other, more interesting one (12.329.14,1-2; see Table 2, column A: *Mahābhārata*) belongs to a prose passage and presents a list of incidents at which gods and others were disfigured by curses. In this list, the first two examples are as follows:

Indra obtained from Gautama('s curse) the condition of being gold-bearded, on account of his violating Ahalyā.
And on account of Kauśika, Indra lost his testicles and obtained the condition of having a ram's testicles.³

These two statements are intriguing since they seem to separate two narrative elements (found also in the version of the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*), namely Indra's transgression and his punishment, and to combine them with other quite unexpected elements. Why should 'gold-beardedness' (*hariśmaśrutām*) be deemed a punishment? Why should it be an appropriate punishment for the violation of Ahalyā? And in the second statement, what does the name Kauśika (a family name associated with Viśvāmitra) signify?

The *Subrahmanya* Formula and its Explanation in the *Brāhmaṇas*

An answer to at least the last of these questions may be provided by an investigation of the oldest mention of the relationship between Indra and Ahalyā (see Table 2, column A: *Brāhmaṇas*). This is found in the so-called *subrahmanya* formula, used at the beginning of the sacrifice to invite the main participants, Indra, the gods, and the brahmins. This formula occurs in much the same form in the *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* (2.79), the *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa* in the *Sāmaveda* tradition (1.1.20-1), the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (3.3.4.18-19), the *Taittirīyāranyaka* in the *Yajurveda* tradition (1.12.4), and in two *Śrautasūtras* (*Lāṭyāyanaśrautasūtra* 1.3.1, *Drāhyāyanaśrautasūtra* 1.3.3). It runs as follows:

³ *ahalyādharaṇanimittam hi gautamād dharmaśrutām indrah prāptah/ kauśika-nimittam candro muṣkaviyogaṁ meṣavṛṣaṇatvam avāpa/*

Come here, O Indra, come here with your golden steeds!
(You who are/took the shape of) Medhātithi's ram,
(You who are/took the shape of) Vṛṣaṇaśva's co-wife;
(You who) as a wild ox leapt down,
O lover of Ahalyā (lit. 'the unploughable one?');
O Brahmin belonging to the Kuśika family,
(You who are) called (or called yourself) Gautama!⁴

The *Brāhmaṇa* sources also provide some explanation, in particular those belonging to the *Sāmaveda* tradition. Interestingly, the latter differ from each other, but the explanations of the *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* tend to agree with those of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* of the White Yajurveda. Only the last three invocations are relevant for the discussion of the *Mahābhārata* quotation above. The first of these names Indra as 'Ahalyā's lover'. The *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* and the *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa* are in this case unanimous in declaring that, 'He was the lover of Ahalyā Maitreyī' (*ahalyāyai ha maitreyyai jāra āsa*). In his commentary on the *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa*, Sāyaṇa explains that 'Maitreyī' is the 'daughter of Mitrā (f.)' No husband is mentioned in any explanation given in the *Brāhmaṇas*.

As for the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, after this invocation, there is simply a statement summarizing the preceding invocations (and thus separating them from the following ones):

With these, which are his special adventures, he (=the priest) wishes to please him at this (occasion of the sacrifice).⁵

Of the remaining two invocations, the first (*kauśika brāhmaṇa*) is explained in the *Jaiminiyabrāhmaṇa* with the following story: 'At the battle with the Asuras he destroyed the Vedas; he learned them from Viśvāmitra, that is why he called himself Kauśika.' The *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa* suggests another explanation: 'As a brahmin of the Kuśika family he used to go to her' (*kauśiko ha smaināṁ brāhmaṇa upanyeti*).

This might be exactly what is needed to explain the allusion in the *Mahābhārata* (book 12), in which Indra is cursed to lose his testicles not by Gautama but by Kauśika. Such a curse is, however, not mentioned at all in any of the *Brāhmaṇa* explanations, since there was obviously no husband to curse him.

⁴ *indrāgacha hāriva āgacha/ mēdhātithir meṣa vṛṣaṇaśvasya mene/|gaurāvaskandin āhalyāyai jāra/ kauśika brāhmaṇa gautama bruvāṇa/|*

⁵ *iti tād yāny ēvāsya cāraṇāni/ tair ēvānam etāṁ prāmudodayiṣati/|*

The last invocation (*gautama bruvāṇa*), which would fit our story best, seems to be an optional addition invented, according to the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, by the celebrated Āruṇi. The *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa*, however, rejects the wording and corrects it to *kauśika bruvāṇa*, which it does not explain separately. The *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa* tells a different story, in order to explain *gautama bruvāṇa*:

In the battle between gods and *asuras*, Indra asked Gotama, who was practising austerities between the two battle lines, to be a spy for the gods. When the ascetic refused, Indra obtained permission to assume the shape of the ascetic in order to be a spy himself. That is why he called himself Gautama.

Thus it is fairly obvious that in the *Brāhmaṇas* the explanations are by no means unanimous and that there is not yet any connection made between Ahalyā and Gautama. In the *Mahābhārata*, there seems to be a kind of bifurcation: although Gautama is named as Ahalyā's husband, it is Kauśika's curse that leads to Indra's characteristic punishment.

I shall now sum up the elements which eventually led to the development of the Ahalyā narrative. In the *subrahmaṇya* formula, Ahalyā appears as Indra's beloved, but without any husband; in the explanation provided by the *Ṣaḍviṃśabrāhmaṇa*, Indra assumes the shape of the brahmin Kauśika when he visits Ahalyā (it is not said that Kauśika was her husband, but this may be suspected); and in the *Mahābhārata*, she appears as Gautama's wife. But there is no mention of her being guilty of betraying her husband, nor of any punishment she has to suffer, before the detailed versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where, in the version found in book 1, her punishment is closely connected with the motif of purification through Rāma. This motif with its religious implications can then be traced in all later versions or adaptations of the Rāma story: for example, in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* (11.33-4), in the relevant sections of the *Purāṇas*, in the *Adhyātmārāmāyaṇa* (1.5), and of course in the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidās (1.242-3).

Indra's Epithets and the Prehistory of Ahalyā

I shall now turn to the question of Indra's punishment. I have already described three procedures in the epics: the curse to lose his testicles, a misfortune then alleviated by providing him with a ram's testicles; another curse making him inferior to his enemy Indrajit and thereby destabilizing his rank as king of the gods; and the curse of 'gold-beardedness'. The loss of testicles appears to represent a primitive form of justice, whereas the substitution of a ram's testicles may be traced back to the invocations of the *subrahmaṇya* formula: *médhātīther meṣa vr̥ṣaṇāśvasya mene* may have suggested the epithet

meṣavṛṣaṇa, 'having a ram's testicles'. The roots of Indra's inferiority to his enemy can be found in the general attitude of the *Brāhmaṇas* towards the old R̥gvedic gods, according to which even Indra as king of the gods wielded little real power. In attempting to explain the 'gold-beardedness', a look at an older stratum of text sources, namely Indra's epithet's in the *R̥gveda*, may be helpful: they seem to have been partly misunderstood, partly reinterpreted in later strata. One of these epithets is *hariṣmaśru* (*hariṣmaśāru* in the RV) 'having a golden or yellowish beard'; why it should be a punishment to have a golden beard, is not immediately understandable. Perhaps the ideal of beauty had somehow changed after the immigration of the ancient Aryans, who were presumably fair-haired, and in later periods blond hair and beard were regarded as abnormal.

Far more important for the further development of the Ahalyā story is another well-known epithet of Indra in the epics: 'having a thousand eyes' (*sahasrākṣa* or synonymous formations). This epithet is used in the *R̥gveda* mainly for other gods (Varuṇa, Soma, the moon, Indra and Vāyu in the dual, etc.). It probably refers to the thousand spies through whom a mighty king may come to know everything that is going on in his realm. This interpretation certainly fits for Varuṇa and Soma, who are often called kings in the *R̥gveda*. Someone who 'has a thousand eyes' (that is, has his eyes everywhere) comes to know if anything is wrong and can take measures against crime and injustice. This was certainly valid also for Indra, the mighty king of the gods and ideal ruler of the world, as he appeared to his believers. As a common epithet of Indra, *sahasrākṣa* is used frequently in the epics (thus it also occurs in the first version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* before Indra is cursed by Gautama).

Later tradition, however, tended to take this epithet literally and tried to explain how these thousand eyes that are so characteristic of Indra came into existence. Such an explanation can already be found in the *Mahābhārata* (1.203) where the following myth is told. In order to cause disunion between two dangerous demons, Sunda and Upasunda, Brahmā causes an extremely beautiful *apsaras* (named Tilottamā) to be made by Viśvakarman, the divine sculptor. When she respectfully circumambulates the gods, they feel such desire to look at her that Śiva grows three other faces, one in each direction, so that he may watch her continuously, whereas Indra develops eyes everywhere on his body, a thousand in total.

A similar myth about beautiful Tilottamā can be found in the *Viṣṇu-dharmottarapurāṇa*, in a passage about the origin of celebrated *apsarases*, among whom, surprisingly, Ahalyā is listed as well. The origin of Tilottamā is described thus:

In order to destroy (the demons) Sunda and Upasunda, Viśvakarman collected sesamum seed after sesamum seed (*tilam*) and created Tilottamā ('best of all sesamum seeds')

adorned with all jewels, at whose circumambulation the holder of the trident (= Śiva) became four-faced, and illustrious Śakra with the thunderbolt, the slayer of (the demon) Pāka became thousand-eyed (*sahasrākṣa*).⁶

The origin of Ahalyā is described as follows (see Table 2, column A: VDhP):

The Grandsire (= Brahmā), wishing to see all loveliness of shape assembled in one place, created a singular beauty in the three worlds, named Ahalyā. And Brahmā with his auspicious four faces gave her to Gautama: it was for her sake that Śakra was bereft of his testicles by Gautama.⁷

This prehistory of Ahalyā, her outstanding beauty and her marriage to Gautama, is also related in the version of the Ahalyā story found in book 7 of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (7.30.16-42). It starts with the following report: 'Among all living beings created by Brahmā, who were originally similar in shape, it was first Ahalyā who was different from all the rest because of her special beauty; for this purpose Brahmā had created her.' This feature of the narrative may be traced back to the fanciful comparison in the first version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where Ahalyā appeared to Rāma 'like some divine illusion fashioned by the creator' (see above), which seems to have been taken literally. (In the southern recension, it is also connected with an etymology of the word *ahalyā*, which is said to mean something like 'without any disfigurement or flaw' but might also be understood from the context as 'incomparable'.) Such a beautiful woman is naturally desired by the other gods too; Brahmā, however, decides to entrust her to the celebrated sage Gautama for education, and finally to marry her to him, at which point Indra in particular, becomes enraged. In this context, Indra's motive for intruding into Ahalyā's married life is obviously jealousy or envy of Gautama. Ahalyā's punishment for having intercourse with Indra is, in this version, the loss of the uniqueness of her beauty, which from now on she has to share with other beings, so that jealousy would never again arise on account of there being only one beautiful woman. In addition to this, she is repudiated by her husband (a parallel to Sītā's fate in the same book of the *i-āmāyaṇa*), a punishment which is softened in the southern recension, as mentioned earlier. As for Indra, to whose mind Brahmā had recalled this story

⁶ *sundopasundanāśāya nirmītā viśvakarmaṇā/ tilaṇṭilaṇ samādhāya sarvaratnais tilottamā/ yasyāḥ pradakṣiṇāj jātāḥ caturvaktraḥ pinākadhṛk/ sahasranayanāḥ śrīmān vajrī śakraḥ ca pākahā/* 1.128.27-8.

⁷ *ekasthaṇ rūpasauṇḍaryam draṣṭum icchan pitāmahaḥ/ ahalyāṃ nāma kṛtavāns trailokyasyaikaśundarīm/ gautamāya ca tām prādād brahmā śubhacaturmukhaḥ/ yasyāḥ kṛte gautamena śakro vivṛṣaṇaḥ kṛtaḥ/* 1.128.30-1.

as the explanation for his shameful defeat, he is given the advice to purify himself by means of a Vaiṣṇava sacrifice; acting accordingly, he regains his rank of the king of the gods.

The allusion in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* seems to be closely connected with this second version in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as far as the prehistory is concerned (but which is dependent on which I would not venture to say). Indra's punishment to be *vivṛṣaṇa* ('without testicles') goes back to the common epic tradition, whereas the image of Indra's thousand eyes is obviously borrowed from the *Mahābhārata* passage about Tilottamā, which had nothing to do with the Ahalyā story.

A Full Account in the *Brahmapurāṇa*

This short version of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* may well have been the starting point for the version of the Ahalyā story in the *Brahmapurāṇa* (87.44), or, more precisely, in the section entitled 'the magnification of (the river) Gautamī' (*gautamīmāhātmya*), Gautamī being a name for the Godāvari. One of the salutary places on its banks is the confluence with the river Ahalyā, the origin of which is told by Brahmā to Nārada, in a new version of our Ahalyā story, a version which is adapted to the context in a characteristic way (see Table 2, Column C). As an introduction, the prehistory of Ahalyā is told in full detail: Brahmā reports that he once created many beautiful young girls, the most praiseworthy being Ahalyā. After reflecting for a long time on who might deserve to bring her up, he decided on Gautama, a knowledgeable and in every respect excellent brahmin, and entrusted her to him. When she reached marriageable age, Gautama returned the girl well adorned and well educated. As soon as they see her, all the gods want her and ask Brahmā for her hand. Brahmā secretly wishes to give her to Gautama, but officially he states that whoever, after circumambulating the earth, returns first shall marry her. All the gods immediately start on their journey. Gautama, staying behind, beholds the pregnant wishing-cow Surabhi and circumambulates her, knowing that she is *urvī* ('broad', a term meaning 'pregnant' as well as 'the earth'). He also circumambulates a Śiva *linga* and then returns, being the first of all to arrive. Brahmā accepts him as the winner and marries Ahalyā to him. The gods, when they arrive one after the other, are made to understand that they are too late, so they return to heaven, while Ahalyā and Gautama settle in a hermitage on the Brahmagiri and live happily together. Thus runs the prehistory which, in this version, is especially colourful.

The main story presents further new and interesting details. Indra in his heaven learns about the happy married life of the couple. Assuming the guise of a brahmin, he sets out for the place in order to see for himself. When he sees Ahalyā, he loses his senses: without considering the consequences, he stays near

the hermitage, waiting for his chance. One day, when Gautama has set off with his pupils to perform a morning ritual on the bank of the Gautamī (which must have been at some distance from the hermitage), Indra makes use of his absence. Assuming Gautama's shape, he approaches Ahalyā, tells her that he has been overcome by desire for her beauty, takes her by the hand and leads her into the hut where she yields to him, believing him to be her husband:

Ahalyā, however, did not recognize him; she took her lover (*jāram*) for Gautama, enjoying love with him according to her pleasure...⁸

The choice of the word *jāra* ('lover') undoubtedly recalls the *subrahmanya* formula (*ahalyāyai jāra*).

Meanwhile Gautama returns with his disciples. He wonders why Ahalyā does not rush out joyfully to greet him in her usual way. Instead the servants approach full of surprise that he should be in the hut as well as outside it, and praise the ascetic powers which enable him to multiply himself. Full of foreboding, Gautama enters the hut and calls for Ahalyā who, on hearing his voice, immediately rises from the bed and accuses her lover of deceiving her. Being afraid of Gautama, Indra turns himself into a cat (*biḍāla*). Gautama, however, threatens to turn him to ashes unless he makes himself known. Thereupon Indra confesses who he is and asks for forgiveness for his deed, the responsibility for which he lays upon Kāmadeva's arrow. Gautama nevertheless curses him to become *sahasrabhagavat*: since his sin consisted of enjoying the vulva (*bhaga*), his body would be marked by a thousand (*sahasra*) of them.

In order to understand the background of this curse, one may again turn to the juridical literature. A relevant *śloka* occurs in the *Bṛhaspatismṛti* (24.14, quoted in Kane, vol. III, p.532):

If anyone performs the sexual act in disguise, his punishment is the confiscation of all his wealth; he should be branded with the 'vulva mark' (*bhagāṅka*), and then be expelled from the town.⁹

This description of the transgression fits perfectly with Indra's deed: by pretending to be Ahalyā's husband he has managed to seduce her; in consequence, his punishment is to be branded by the *bhaga* mark, which the curse multiplies by a thousand – a new motif which has become very popular in

⁸ *na bubodha tv ahalyā taṃ, jāraṃ mene tu gautamaṃ/ ramamāṇā yathāsa- khyam...* (BrP 87.44).

⁹ *chadmanā kāmāyēd yas tu tasya sarvāharo damaḥ/ āṅkayitvā bhagāṅkena purāṇa nivāsayet tataḥ||*

the Purāṇic versions of the story.

Ahalyā in this version is cursed by her husband to become a dried-up river – a motif which only appears in this specific narrative context. When she claims to be innocent and even produces the servants as witnesses, her husband softens his curse by announcing that she will retain her former shape as soon as she (as a river) joins the river Gautamī with its purifying power.

Indra also asks Gautama for mercy, and Gautama announces that his punishment too will be softened by the power of the Gautamī: after bathing in its water, he will be purified from sin and the shameful marks will turn into eyes. With this, a new and obviously convincing explanation is provided for the epithet *sahasrākṣa* ('having a thousand eyes'), which in the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* was explained by the face- or eye-creating effect of Tilottamā's beauty, an explanation which appeared, however, already in the direct vicinity of the Ahalyā story, so that the replacement of the old curse (deprivation of testicles) by the new one (being branded with *bhaga* marks, which resemble eyes) may have suggested itself.

The characteristic features of the Ahalyā story in the *Brahmapurāṇa* may be summed up as follows:

1. The prehistory is provided with particular imaginative features (such as the competition for Ahalyā's hand).
2. The Alkmene motif, as I would call it, is prominent: Ahalyā is innocent, since Indra appears effectively as her husband; even the servants believe that Gautama has duplicated himself and can attest to Ahalyā's innocence.
3. Afraid of being discovered, Indra takes the shape of a cat.
4. Indra is cursed to be branded with a thousand 'vulva marks', which are later mercifully turned into eyes; his old epithet 'thousand-eyed' (*sahasrākṣa*) is thereby explained in a naturalistic way.
5. The softening of the curses is effected by the purifying contact with the river Gautamī; thus two new auspicious places of pilgrimage are established, one called 'Indratīrtha', the other 'Ahalyāsamgama' ('confluence of the Ahalyā'). This narrative context seems also to be responsible for the specific curse called down upon Ahalyā: that she should become a dried-up driver.

A Mixture of Motifs in the *Padmapurāṇa*

There are three other *Purāṇas* in which the Ahalyā story is retold in full detail: the *Padmapurāṇa*, the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (two versions which stress quite

different aspects and are thus complementary to each other), and the *Skandapurāṇa* (see Table 2, column C). I cannot deal with these in the same detail, but a few distinctive characteristics should be highlighted.

I shall start with the *Padmapurāṇa* version, which is in several respects similar to that of the *Brahmapurāṇa*. There is a shorter version of the prehistory of Ahalyā's marriage; then the main story starts with Indra waiting for Gautama to absent himself. At some point, Gautama leaves the hut in order to take a ritual bath. Ahalyā is occupied with performing a *pūjā* to the divinities when Indra appears in Gautama's shape and demands a kiss. Ahalyā first rejects him, pointing out that it would be inappropriate to neglect her duties towards the gods for the sake of love. Her fake husband, however, instructs her regarding the duties which she, as a faithful wife, owes to him, especially concerning the very point he has in mind, and insists on having his will despite her reluctance. Meanwhile, by means of his supernatural gifts of knowledge, Gautama realizes what is going on and returns to the hermitage. Indra immediately turns himself into an *ākhu* (a rat or a mole?), but leaves the footprints of a cat (*vr̥ṣadamṣṭra*). Thereupon Gautama asks him: 'Who are you, assuming the shape of a cat (*mārjāra*)?' (5.51.27). Thus the motif of Indra turning himself into a cat appears again, but here the two terms used for the animal (*vr̥ṣadamṣṭra*, *mārjāra*) are different from that used in the *Brahmapurāṇa* (*biḍāla*).

Indra's punishment in this version is a strange mixture of motifs: he is cursed, first, to be marked by a thousand vulvas (*sahasrabhaga*), then to lose his male organ (*liṅgam*), and finally his shame should be visible to all the inhabitants of heaven (which presumably means that he cannot retain his rank as king of the gods).

Having cursed Indra, Gautama now interrogates Ahalyā, who declares herself innocent. However, since she has become impure by intercourse with Indra, she is cursed to become a mere skeleton of skin and bones. She asks for a limitation on this curse. Gautama prophesies that at some point in the future Rāma will come here together with Vasiṣṭha (not Viśvāmitra, strangely enough, as in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) and will laugh about her (5.51.36):

(Gautama speaks:) Seeing you (= Ahalyā), afflicted, dried out, without body, standing (or lying) on the path, Rāma will laugh and say to Vasiṣṭha, 'Who is this unlucky figure, dried up and consisting only of bones?'¹⁰

Here the attribute *nirdeha* ('bodiless') calls to mind the first version of the

¹⁰ *dr̥ṣtvā tvāṃ duḥkhitāṃ śuṣkāṃ nirdehāṃ pathi saṃsthitāṃ/ gadiṣyati ca vai rāmo vasiṣṭhasyāgrato hasan/ kim iyaṃ śuṣkarūpā ca pratimāsthimayāśivā/*

Rāmāyaṇa, while *śuṣkā* or *śuṣkarūpā* ('dried out, dried up') recalls the dry river (*śuṣkanadī*) in the *Brahmapurāṇa* version. The phrase 'standing (or lying) on the path' (*pathi saṃsthitā*) may also be said of a stone or a rock, although in this context it appears to describe a skeleton, which may also be called *śuṣkarūpā*. But *nirdeha* ('bodiless') and *asthimayā pratimā* ('bony image') seem to contradict each other, which in turn suggests that different ideas have been intermingled again.

As for Indra, he hides in the water, full of shame, and praises the deity for whom the vulva (*yoni*, here termed *indrākṣi*, 'Indra's eye') is characteristic. Pleased by his praise, Devī grants him a boon. He asks for his former shape, in order to regain his rank as ruler of the gods, but this is more than can be done for him by her or anyone else. However, she can create a thousand eyes in the middle of the 'vulva marks'; as *Sahasrākṣa* ('characterized by a thousand eyes') he will again be able to rule over the gods. Finally she restores his male organ (*śiṣṇa*) and provides it with a ram's testicles (*meṣāṇḍa*) – again we find a combination of various well-known motifs, none of which could evidently be given up once it had entered the tradition.

The special characteristics of this version can now be summarized:

1. Ahalyā and Indra in the form of Gautama have a dispute before they make love.
2. Indra appears to Gautama as a cat.
3. Many different (and partly contradictory) elements are combined in the curses and their softening.
4. Unlike in the other versions, but in accordance with the prescription in the *Āpastambadharmasūtra*, Indra loses his penis (that is, not only his testicles).
5. Ahalyā is released by Rāma, Indra by the Goddess. The latter may seem remarkable in a Vaiṣṇava context, but is probably explained by the fact that she is the deity of the *yoni* (here euphemistically called 'Indra's eye').

Other versions in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* and *Skandapurāṇa*

The *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* presents us with two versions, one is told by Kṛṣṇa Nārāyaṇa to Rādhā (4.47), the other is told to Nārada, the messenger of the gods (4.61). The latter is discussed by G. Bonazzoli in an article about seduction stories in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (*Purāṇa* XIX/2: 321 ff.). According to him, these stories have an underlying common structure which shows how they are influenced by the Caitanya movement, a structure which is manifest in the presentation of the development of a love story in five steps:

(1) falling in love (on the part of the man), (2) description of the female beauty, (3) dialogue in which the woman rejects her lover, (4) obstacle to, or interruption of, the love affair, (5) performance of the act of love. In this structure Bonazzoli sees the reflection of the 'Caitanya doctrine about the importance of the body and *līlā*' (p. 339), love being successful in overcoming every obstacle, even moral scruples.

This may indeed be valid for the second version (4.61); as for the first version (not analysed in Bonazzoli's article) which deals explicitly with 'the breaking of the pride of the king of the gods' (*surapater darpabhāṅgaṃ*), it appears to me to convey quite a different message. It begins by showing Indra in his power, which he has secured for himself by a hundred sacrifices (according to his epithet *śatakratu*, which originally meant 'having a hundred powers of will', but was later interpreted as 'characterized by a hundred sacrifices'). Unfortunately, Indra forgets to pay due respect to some venerable persons and is consequently cursed (not unlike Śakuntalā, incidentally). His mother Tārakā tries to comfort him by assuring him that, even if he has to bear the effect of his actions now, after bad days good days are to come. In order to have a bath, Śakra goes to the (or a) heavenly river (*svarnadī*) one day, where he sees Ahalyā washing herself and is totally confused by the beauty of her limbs. Regaining his senses, he approaches her in the form of her husband, embraces her, and makes love with her until they sink down, happily exhausted. At this moment, the enraged Gautama interrupts them. Indra throws himself at the brahmin's feet. Gautama curses him to be marked by a thousand vulvas (*yoni*), but since Indra has approached him for protection, he is compelled to soften his curse so that these vulva marks will be changed into eyes if Indra worships the sun-god. Gautama further explains the whole incident as being connected with the curses in the introductory passage of the story. Ahalyā's fate in this version is to be a stone for sixty thousand years, since she, though innocent, has become impure and can no longer perform her duties as a housewife. She submits to her husband's verdict. After the sixty thousand years have been completed, Rāma happens to stumble over this stone, whereupon Ahalyā is purified and allowed to return to her husband.

It seems to me that in this version, which certainly describes the act of love in some detail, much greater emphasis is placed on the inevitability of fate, and especially on the idea that curses must be fulfilled. As for the structure of the development of a love affair in five steps, only the first and the last one, falling in love and fulfilment of love, can be identified; they are, however, integrated into a quite different thematic structure centring on non-intended transgression and its unavoidable consequences, Indra's transgression being explained as a result of curses that he inadvertently provoked due to the whim of fate.

As for the second version, it centres rather on the question of how the flawless, virtuous, chaste wife of Gautama could possibly be seduced. Kṛṣṇa Nārāyaṇa's answer to Nārada's question gives a more detailed narrative, which involves a

new peculiar feature. Indra first sees Ahalyā in Puṣkara on a pilgrimage and falls in love with her. The next day, he finds an opportunity to watch her secretly while she takes a bath in the Mandākinī river. Out of his senses, he immediately approaches her and praises her beauty in every detail, a beauty to which he, as an expert in love, can certainly do better justice than the ascetic Gautama, who knows nothing about *kāmaśāstra* (the science of love). He promises to place her even above his wife Śacī and wonders how Brahmā could be so foolish as to give her to an ascetic disinclined towards love (obviously all this presupposes versions like that of the *Brahmapurāṇa*). Ahalyā, however, is not impressed. Instead she rebukes him, tells him how despicable his intentions are, and informs him that, although beautiful women are created for the purpose of bewitching the minds of men (if only for the sake of procreation), a wise man should resist this bewitchment; in any case, intercourse with another's wife leads directly to hell. Then she returns home and tells the whole story to her husband, providing much amusement to them both.

Indra, however, does not give up. When Gautama happens to be absent one day, Indra takes advantage of this opportunity and makes love with Ahalyā in the guise of her husband. Gautama realizes what is going on and curses them both, Indra to have his body covered with vulvas (*bhagāṅga*), and Ahalyā to become a stone in the forest. In spite of her entreaties, Gautama refuses to change his mind on the grounds that she has become impure, whether or not she intended to do so, or even knew about it; however, her curse is limited in the same way as in the other version (that is, until Rāma kicks the stone with his foot).

In this version, Indra's first encounter with Ahalyā, especially the description of her beauty and Indra's attempt to seduce her, is indeed presented in more erotic detail – there is no doubt that people enjoyed telling and listening to a story like this – but, in my view, the main concern is with moral concepts. On the one hand, Ahalyā's blamelessness is contrasted with Indra's immorality; on the other, the consequences of even unconscious transgression are strictly observed (in Ahalyā's case, for instance, punishment is the result of her impurity rather than her guilt). But the most striking feature of this version is the duplication of Indra's meeting with Ahalyā, first in his own shape and without success, then in Gautama's shape as usual. This feature I have found in only one other version, that of the *Skandapurāṇa* (5.3.136). Here too Indra first appears in his own form and tries to persuade Ahalyā in a way similar to that in the second *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* version (the arguments are, by the way, much the same as Rāvaṇa's arguments before he abducts Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.) Ahalyā does not respond; she seems to be unresolved. Indra interprets this in his favour and approaches her again, this time in Gautama's shape. The rest of the story does not differ much from the versions of the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*.

The narrative elements of the versions told in the *Purāṇas* (see Table 2, column C) may now be summarized as follows:

1. The most elaborate version of the prehistory (that is, the creation and education of Ahalyā and her marriage to Gautama) is presented in the *Brahmapurāṇa*. This fits the allusion in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* (see Table 2, column A: VDhP 1.128), from which its core may have been borrowed, and is probably the basis for the shorter version in the *Padmapurāṇa*.
2. In all the versions, Indra approaches Ahalyā in her husband's form in order to make love to her without being recognized by her. A special development can be observed in the second version of the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, as well as in the *Skandapurāṇa*, where Indra appears twice – once in his own form, without success, then in the form of Gautama – so that no one might suspect Ahalyā of being curious to experience the love of the king of the gods.
3. Caught in the act, Indra assumes the form of a cat in the *Brahmapurāṇa* and in the *Padmapurāṇa*, whereas in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* and *Skandapurāṇa* he immediately asks Gautama for mercy.
4. The 'vulva marks' have become the most popular form of punishment for Indra; only in the *Padmapurāṇa* version has the old curse that he should lose his testicles been integrated with it.
5. Ahalyā's punishment is less consistent: in the *Brahmapurāṇa* she is cursed to become a dry river, in the *Padmapurāṇa* a skeleton, but the adjectives 'bodiless' and 'dried up' also recall the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Brahmapurāṇa* versions. The two versions of the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* as well as that of the *Skandapurāṇa* agree in that she is cursed to become a stone or a rock – a motif which then gains more and more popularity and which also appears in allusions to the story (e.g. in the *Raghuvamśa*).
6. Ahalyā is released from the curse by Rāma's visit to the hermitage; the only exception to this is found in the *Brahmapurāṇa* where, as befits the context, she is released by the river Gautamī.
7. The softening of Indra's curse so that he becomes *sahasrākṣa* ('thousand-eyed') is common to all versions. They differ only in the way in which this is achieved: in the *Brahmapurāṇa* by bathing in the Gautamī, in the *Padmapurāṇa* by praising the Goddess (the tutelary deity of the *yonī*), in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* by worshipping the sun-god, and in the *Skandapurāṇa* by Gautama himself after the intervention of the gods.

An Anecdote in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*

In conclusion, I should like to glance at one other popular version of the story,

that of the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. Here we find a nice detail, a pun by means of which Ahalyā can avoid the sin of telling a lie. In this version, she has recognized Indra in his disguise but has nevertheless accepted him as her lover (as in the first *Rāmāyaṇa* version). As in the *Padmapurāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, Gautama becomes aware of what is happening by his superhuman knowledge, and interferes. In a panic, Indra assumes the shape of a male cat (*mārjāra*), as in the *Padma-* and *Brahmapurāṇa* versions. Instead of asking Indra who he is, Gautama asks his wife. She replies '*mājāra*', which can be interpreted either as the Prakrit form of *mārjāra* 'cat' or of the compound *maj-jāra*, 'my lover'. Gautama laughs and softens his curse that she should become a rock by adding that, since she has at least spoken the truth, she will be released by Rāma. Indra is cursed to have what he has so desired a thousand-fold on his own body; but when he sees the *apsaras* Tilottamā, they will turn into eyes (which recalls the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* and *Mahābhārata* stories about Tilottamā).

The date of the composition of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* is comparatively late (eleventh century AD), but its Prakrit source, Guṇabhadra's *Bṛhatkathā* must have been much older, presumably of the first or second century AD. The Ahalyā narrative may well go back to a Prakrit original, but it also appears to presuppose the first version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as the Tilottamā story of the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, as the softening of the curses shows. The narrative problem of the first *Rāmāyaṇa* version (that is, why Indra should assume the form of Gautama, when he is recognized by Ahalyā) is, however, eliminated here: Indra does not bother to take the form of Gautama. The motif that, in order to escape, Indra takes the form of a cat (shared with the *Brahma-* and *Padmapurāṇa* versions) may have been invented for this version where it is needed for the pun (which consequently also serves to justify the softening of Ahalyā's curse). If so, it will then have been borrowed by the *Brahmapurāṇa* version, even though it was not needed there. Alternatively, it may be that the motif of feline stealth was invented independently and did already exist in a version which was made use of either by the *Bṛhatkathā* or by the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (for we cannot rule out the possibility that the latter introduced the pun when recomposing the Prakrit version in Sanskrit). The word *mārjāra* does not appear in the *Brahmapurāṇa* which uses the term *biḍāla*, a vernacular term well attested in the epics and in Pali (but which does not occur in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* at all). Thus we are not compelled to assume that the *Brahmapurāṇa* presupposes the *Kathāsaritsāgara*; and in any case the idea of taking the form of a cat in order to escape easily is not particularly far-fetched.

Whether this version, interspersed as it is with the moralizing comments usually found in fables, is the most skilfully told (as Rau (1966) has opined) is a matter of taste. To some extent, the narrative culminates here in a kind of joke based on the pun, which is certainly entertaining. On the other hand, it lacks the tragic dimension of the Alkmene motif that is fully developed in the

Purāṇic versions, as well as the connection with the mythical and sacrificial background from which the legend started to grow (the *subrahmanya* formula, the explanations of how Indra came to lose his former rank, and so on.)

Turning back to the initial question of who were the many women who became the prey of Indra the womanizer, the answer may now be given, 'Yes, there are indeed many incidents, but it is always the same Ahalyā, who is multiplied by the various versions in which her story exists'.

Abbreviations

BrahmaP	<i>Brahmapurāṇa</i>
BrahmavaivartaP	<i>Brahmavaivartapurāṇa</i>
KSS	<i>Kathāsaritsāgara</i>
PadmaP ASS	<i>Padmapurāṇa, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series</i>
RV	<i>Rgveda</i>
Skanda	<i>Skandapurāṇa</i>
VDhP	<i>Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa</i>

References

Texts and Translations

- Adhyātmārāmāyaṇa*. Critical edition. by N. Siddhantaratna. Calcutta Sanskrit Series XI. Calcutta, 1935.
- Āpastambadharmasūtra*
- *Āpastambīyadharmasūtram: Āpastambha's Aphorisms on the Sacred Law of the Hindus*, ed. G. Bühler. Bombay Sanskrit Series XLIV, L. 3rd edn.: Bombay, 1932.
 - Bühler, G. (tr.). *The Sacred Law of the Aryas, as taught in the schools of Āpastambha, Gautama, Vasishṭha and Baudhāyana*, part I. Sacred Books of the East 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.
- Brahmapurāṇa*
- *Brahmapurāṇa*. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 28. Pune, 1895.
 - P. Schreiner and R. Söhnen: *Sanskrit Indices and Text of the Brahmapurāṇa*. Purāṇa Research Publications 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987.
- Brhaspatismṛti*, ed. by K.V.R. Aiyangar. Gaekwad Oriental Series 85. Baroda, 1941.
- Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, ed. V.G. Apte. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 102. Pune, 1935.
- Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa*. Critical edition by Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra. 2nd

The Ahalyā Story through the Ages

- rev. edn. Delhi, 1986.
- Kathāsaritsāgara*. 2nd edn. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977.
- Mahābhārata*. Critical edition by V.S. Sukthankar, S.K. Belvalkar, P.L. Vaidya, and others. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1927-66.
- Padmapurāṇa*
- *Padmapurāṇa*, ed. Viśvanātha Nārāyaṇa Maṇḍalika. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series Extra No. 1. Pune, 1893-4.
 - *Padmapurāṇa*. 4 vols. Bombay 1927. Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1984-5.
 - *Padmapurāṇa*, tr. N.A. Deshpande. Parts 1-3. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology 39-41. Delhi, 1988-90.
- Raghuvamśa of Kalidāsa*. Ed. by G.R. Nandargikar. 4th edn. Delhi, 1971.
- Rāmāyaṇa*
- *Rāmāyaṇa*. Critical edition by G.H. Bhatt and others. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960-73.
 - Goldman, R.P. (transl.): *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki: An Epic of Ancient India*. Vol. 1. Princeton: University Press, 1984.
- Rāmcaritmānas*
- Tulsidās: *Rāmcaritmānas*. Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1940.
 - Growse, F.S. (tr.): *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulasī Dāsa*, ed. R.C. Prasad. Delhi, 1978.
- Śaḍvīmśabrāhmaṇa*, ed. H.F. Eelsingh. Thesis. Utrecht, 1908.
- Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*
- *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, ed. A. Weber. 2nd ed. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series no. 96. Varanasi, 1964.
 - Eggeling, J. (tr.): *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa according to the Mādhyandina School*. Part II, Books III and IV. Sacred Books of the East 26. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885. Delhi, 1972.
- Skandapurāṇa*. Gurumaṇḍala Series 20. Calcutta: Manasukharāya Mora, 1960-.
- Śrautasūtras*
- Parpola, A. *Śrautasūtras of Lāṭyāyana and Drāhyāyana and their Commentaries*. 2 vols. Helsinki, 1968.
- Taittirīyāranyaka*, ed. with Sāyaṇa's commentary by Rājendraśāla Mitra. Calcutta, 1871.
- Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*. Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara Press, 1912.
- ### Secondary Sources
- Doniger O'Flaherty, W. 1975. *Hindu Myths*. Penguin Classics.
- Kane, P.V. 1946. *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law*, vol. III. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Lindberger, Ö. 1956. *The Transformations of Amphitryon*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Bonazzoli, G. 1977. 'Seduction Stories in the Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa: A Study

- in Purāṇic Structure'. *Purāṇa* XIX/2:321-41.
- Oertel, H. 'Contributions from the Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa to the History of the Brāhmaṇa Literature.' *JAOS* 1897: 15-48.
- Rau, W. 1966. 'Fünfzehn Indra-Geschichten.' *Asiatische Studien* 20: 72-100.
- Rocher, L. 1986. *The Purāṇas. A History of Indian Literature* vol. II, fasc. 3. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Söhnen, R., and P. Schreiner. 1989. *Brahmapurāṇa: Summary of Contents*. Purāṇa Research Publications 2. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Söhnen, R. 1991. 'Indra and Women'. *BSOAS* LIV: 68-74.
- Varma, Dh. 1937. 'Evolution of the Myth of Ahalyā Maitreyī.' *Jha Commemoration Volume*, Allahabad: 427-33.

4

Paraśurāma and Time

Lynn Thomas

Introduction

Paraśurāma, the complex Bhārgava figure who comes to be viewed as the sixth avatar (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu, is associated with a large body of myths and has been the subject of a number of different studies (e.g. Gail 1977). Most of these studies have concentrated on the central myths which go to make up his story in the classical texts, or on later deeds assigned to him in the regional traditions of South and West India. One area of Paraśurāma's career which has remained relatively unexplored, however, is his intervention in the affairs of the avatars who follow him, Rāma Dāśarathi and Kṛṣṇa, as told in the narratives of the two epics. This involvement in stories subsequent to his own avatar period, and the strange relationship to mythical time which it confers on Paraśurāma, is the subject which I should like to explore.¹

I should like to thank Nick Allen, John Brockington and Freda Matchett for their comments on this chapter, and also Jim Benson for comments on a previous version.

¹ It should be pointed out that although the story of Paraśurāma first appears in the *Mahābhārata* and the main features are carried over into most subsequent tellings, he is not in fact consistently recognized as an avatar until the Purāṇic accounts, and only one of the epic references gives him that status: 12.326.77. This and all other references to the *Mahābhārata* are to the critical edition edited by V.S. Sukthankar *et al.* Although this change between epic and Purāṇic accounts is important for our understanding of the development of the myth, most of the important details of the deeds themselves remain the same in both. This means that the elements which make it suitable to be counted as an avatar story are already present, even where that status is not yet conferred. Consequently, I shall bring this awareness into my discussion of the epic accounts where relevant. A similar, though less important, problem is encountered with the name of this figure, for Paraśurāma is not used in the epics, where he is more commonly called Rāma Jāmadagnya, Rāma Bhārgava or simply Rāma. Again, however, for simplicity, I shall keep to the name Paraśurāma throughout. For further discussion of Rāma Jāmadagnya's association with this name, see Goldman 1972.